

Information Sheet for Patients Seeking Evaluation After Possible Exposure to Anthrax

What is anthrax?

Anthrax is a naturally occurring bacterial disease that is caused by the bacteria *Bacillus anthracis*. This disease is most often found in wild or domestic animals (deer, cattle, goats, sheep and other animals). Anthrax can occur in humans when we come in contact with infected animals or through bio-terrorism. Anthrax cannot be transmitted from one person to another. There are three kinds of human Anthrax exposure: Skin, Gut, and Inhaled

What are the most common symptoms of anthrax disease?

Inhalation anthrax most often begins as an illness that resembles "flu" with fever, feeling ill and tired, body aches, and perhaps a mild cough. Later symptoms of infection include difficulty breathing, chest pain, and excessive sweating.

Anthrax involving the skin may cause a painless red sore usually involving the face, neck, hands, or arms. It may or may not itch. The sore may change into blisters, but will eventually turn into a black scab.

What should I do if I think I develop symptoms that I think may be due to anthrax infection?

If you suspect that you are developing symptoms that may be attributable to anthrax infection (skin, gut or inhaled), you should see your health care provider at the earliest opportunity. Remember that there are many other infections that can cause flu-like illness, but if you have symptoms and have concerns, the most prudent action would be to seek medical evaluation.

You were given medications - what does this mean?

Antibiotics have been given to you to prevent you from developing anthrax disease. Your provider has determined that you may have been exposed to anthrax. Because anthrax is a very serious infection, it is extremely important that you take the entire course of the medication that you have been prescribed.

Normally, 60 days of medication are prescribed to prevent anthrax. In some situations, all the information necessary to confirm that an exposure has occurred may not be available. In such cases, your provider may prescribe only 5 or 10 days of medication. If you have been given less than 60 days worth of medication, this means that your provider is waiting for the results of other tests to determine whether or not you need the full course. Once the results of the other tests are available and your provider determines that an

exposure has occurred, you will be given additional medication to complete the full 60 days.

Your provider has given you follow-up instructions. Please follow these as directed.

You were not given any medications - what does this mean?

Based on today's evaluation, your provider has determined that you were not likely exposed to anthrax spores. If you discover other information that may alter this decision, please return for further evaluation.

What medications are available to prevent anthrax?

Currently, two drugs are approved by the Food and Drug Administration to prevent anthrax infection: ciprofloxacin (Cipro) and doxycycline (Doxy). Both medications are very effective at preventing illness when started soon after exposure. Other medications are available if you are not able to take Cipro or Doxy.

What are the common side effects of doxycycline and ciprofloxacin?

Doxycycline can cause loss of appetite, nausea, vomiting, or diarrhea. In some individuals it can cause a skin rash. Others develop a photosensitivity, which means exaggerated sunburn. Other side effects include allergic responses including hives or, rarely, anaphylaxis.

Ciprofloxacin can cause some type of side effect in up to 17% of persons taking this medication. The most frequent effects reported in a large study were nausea, diarrhea, vomiting, abdominal pain/discomfort, headache, restlessness, and rash, photosensitivity, and tendon rupture.

What should I do if I believe that I am developing side effects from the medication?

Return to the clinic as soon as possible, before your next dose. If it is after duty hours or on a weekend, go to an urgent care center or emergency room.

If I have other questions concerning anthrax infection, where can I call?

[Insert phone numbers here.]